

CYPRUS

—A RAMPART

By E. J.



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CHAPTER I.

CYPRUS BARS THE WAY.

It is generally accepted that the year 1942 will be a decisive one for the whole course of the war. The Allied countries, drawn closer together by the recent Treaties between America, Britain and the Soviet Union, are determined to defeat Hitler. The declaration of Victory in 1942 by the Soviet Union has become the objective of all the peoples of the United Nations. The mighty force of united effort can overcome the Axis plan for conquest of the world.

Strategic points, and even formerly obscure places, assume great importance. All these points and places must be defended and become bases of striking back against the aggressors.

It is not unlikely that the Axis Powers will make a supreme effort this year to link up their forces. Hitlerite Germany and Fascist Italy will strive to open the way to the Persian Gulf and join hands with the Japanese. The road to the Persian Gulf is also the road to oil. In addition, it would give the three Powers the opportunity to pool their economic and military resources and, at the same time, enable them to co-ordinate and even unify their strategy. To this end they will utilise all their enormous military strength. It is the only way in which they can postpone their inevitable downfall.

The German "Drive to the East" is the only hope of survival for Hitlerite Germany. The German military machine, assisted by Italians, Hungarians, Rumanians and Finns, and supplied by all the war factories of Europe, is striving to reach the Caspian Sea and Iran. The Nazis planned to capture the Caucasus last autumn, but their plans were frustrated by Soviet heroism and Soviet strategy. Now they are redoubling their efforts in that direction.

In Libya, the southern end of the pincers, German and Italian forces under Rommel, constitute a threat to Egypt and the Suez Canal, and at the same time immobilise a great number of Allied troops and puts a disproportionate strain on Allied shipping. From here the Germans are aiming at the Nile Valley and beyond. These two fronts, the decisive one in Russia and the one in Libya, represent the two-prong Nazi drive eastwards. But there is also a third route, *i.e.*, via Cyprus and Syria . . . or through Turkey.

If the Nazis are prepared to risk everything in one sustained assault to reach the Indian Ocean, it will be necessary for them to capture Cyprus. With Cyprus in their possession the threat to Syria becomes more serious. Reports from neutral sources speak of big concentrations of enemy troops in the Aegean Islands, in Crete, the Dodecanese and the Greek mainland. They comprise infantry, air units, paratroops, and have at their disposal strong forces of fighters and transport planes. These concentrations are there for some specific purpose, mounted and ready for attack.

The people of Cyprus realise full well that the best possible method for their defence and the defence of Egypt and the countries of the Middle East is the speediest opening of the Second Front on the Continent of Europe. This, together with the mighty blows of the Red Armies and the free armed co-operation of the people in these countries, would ensure the complete defeat of Hitlerite Germany by the end of 1942.

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GEOGRAPHIC AND STRATEGIC POSITION.

Cyprus is a fairly big island with an area of 3,613 square miles and a population of approximately 370,000. It is situated at the northern end of the Eastern Mediterranean extremity. It is only fifty miles from the Turkish coast of Karamania, and about eighty miles from the Syrian coast. As can be seen from the map, Cyprus occupies a dominating

position in that part of the world, and in enemy hands it will prove a source of great embarrassment to the Allies. It will bring the naval port of Alexandria and the Palestinian ports within easy bombing range, and enable the Germans to harass the flank of the Eighth Army in the Western Desert. In the hands of Britain, developed as an air base, Cyprus can provide an additional guarantee for the safety of Egypt and the Suez Canal, and can be converted into an offensive base for carrying the war to the Dodecanese.

Strategically, the island occupies an extremely important position. It guards the approaches to Palestine, Syria, Alexandretta and the exposed parts of the southern Turkish coast. Territorially, it is a place which can be easily defended. For the most part, the coastline is rugged and in parts dominated by high mountains, where coastal artillery can play havoc with any invading fleet. A high range of mountains traverses the whole northern part of the island, while the centre and western regions comprise the Troodos Mountains, dominated by Mountain Troodos, nearly 6,500 feet high. Between these two ranges of mountains stretch the perfectly flat, dry plains of Morphou and Mesaoria, varying in width from ten to twenty miles. These plains are admirably suited for aerodromes, while the bases of the mountains can provide ideal bomb-proof hangars or bomb-proof stores for supplies. Batteries of anti-aircraft artillery from many of the dominating heights can afford the island protection against air attack.

The only drawbacks are the absence of deep-water harbours and the lack of adequate facilities for repairs. There is a good network of roads, but in many of the mountainous areas communications are poor.

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CAN CYPRUS BE DEFENDED?

After the fall of Greece the Germans delivered a powerful air attack against Crete. The aerodrome of Maleme was

occupied at the very outset by paratroops and was used by the invaders as a base to pour in a steady stream of air-borne troops. With parachutists and air-borne troops the Germans managed to conquer the island in just under a fortnight. The success of the Germans was principally due to the fact that there were no fighters to oppose their air onslaught. All British fighters were previously withdrawn because of the lack of facilities, there being in existence only one aerodrome—that of Maleme—and consequently the Germans had complete mastery of the air. The Cretan, Greek and Imperial troops fought magnificently, but no troops on earth can stand for long the nervous strain of being constantly battered from the air, bombed and machine-gunned, without being able to hit back and unprotected by friendly aircraft.

Crete was the first country to be conquered from the air. It demonstrated the potency of the air weapon, not only for attack and defence, but also for occupation purposes and for supply. It proved how difficult it is even for the strongest fleet to operate in narrow waters without air support. The tragedy of Crete followed from the fact that both Greece and Britain failed to develop the air defences of the island and did not construct a sufficient number of aerodromes.

Cyprus represents, from the standpoint of defence, essentially the same problem as Crete. The only difference is that the nearest Axis base—the Dodecanese—is over two hundred miles away, whereas the Germans were operating against Crete from bases half that distance and less. If the lesson of Crete has been learned, and sufficient numbers of fighters are stationed on the island and an adequate number of anti-aircraft batteries installed, Cyprus cannot be conquered. There are sufficient indications that the Middle Eastern authorities are thoroughly alive to the importance of Cyprus, and that considerable defensive works have been carried through during the past twelve months. And if, as it is hoped, the defensive position of the island has been

sufficiently developed, then we can be certain that Cyprus has become a real rampart, capable of blocking Hitler's road to the Middle East.

Thus, after sixty-four years of British rule, Cyprus assumes the rôle for which it was originally acquired, *i.e.*, as a fortress in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the time of the occupation (1878) it represented the only British possession in that part of the world. It was to be converted into a military depot to guard the Suez Canal (a controlling part of the shares of which was bought by Disraeli in 1875), and also in order to enable the British Government to discharge their responsibilities devolving from the Anglo-Turkish Treaty of Alliance of 1878. Four years later, Britain occupied Egypt—a position not only of Mediterranean, but of world importance—and Cyprus was relegated to the background. Little attention was paid either to its strategic possibilities or to its economic development and prosperity. Neglect reached such a state, with poverty abounding, that *The Times* was compelled to describe it a few years ago as the “Cinderella of the British Empire.”

During the last war Cyprus was used as a base for supplies and as a rest place for the troops fighting in Palestine and Syria. However, it was not until 1935—the period of the Italian attack upon Abyssinia—that the British Government rediscovered the value of Cyprus. The prospect of war in the Mediterranean, in which it was taken as certain that Fascist Italy would side with Germany, demanded a certain modification of the long-existing British defensive plans. Sir Samuel Hoare, as First Lord of the Admiralty, Air Marshal Brooke-Popham, and General Sir Gordon Finlayson in turn visited the island to study the position for themselves at first hand. But nothing further was done. It required the present war, and particularly the occupation of Greece and Crete, to turn a lurid light upon Cyprus, reveal its dire danger and the resultant danger overhanging the whole of the Middle Eastern regions, before anything on a big scale was attempted. And the result? That Cyprus now stands

as a bastion guarding Syria and barring the way of Hitler and Mussolini.

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THE SPIRIT OF THE CYPRIOTS.

Behind the guns and the fortifications, whatever and how many they may be, stands a vigorous people, united in their determination to resist aggression, and who have already sustained considerable losses in fighting for the Allied cause on many battlefields. The Cypriot people, with a long record of struggle behind them, and ardently democratic, do not want to become slaves to the Nazis. The Italian attack upon Greece—considered by the majority of the Cypriots as their mother-country—put, as far as they were concerned, a new complexion on the war. First, it brought the war near to their own doorstep, and second it revealed definitely that the Axis Powers were bent on the enslavement of all peoples. Since then the Cypriots have not looked back. They have contributed their utmost to the war and continue to do so. This is the more remarkable, and at the same time the more praiseworthy, as they themselves have for years been denied the blessings of even elementary freedom, and they are fighting now, though willingly and courageously, yet without encouragement or inspiration from the officials—fighting, that is to say, with their hands tied behind their backs.

CHAPTER II.

WARS, as do all periods of stress, compel men to think, to question things and—to act. The debacle in France centred attention on the war industry of Britain, and as a result enormous strides forward have been made. The catastrophic developments in the Far East, the easy subjugation of Malaya by the Japanese, the surrender of Singapore, and the occupation of Burma, focused attention upon the Colonial Empire and, more specifically, upon the conditions of Colonial administration. Why was it that wherever the Axis had to face free peoples they had to pay dearly for their successes, while the Japanese, who have been bogged and severely mauled by the free Chinese people for five years, had such enormous military successes in the Colonial possessions of Britain and Holland? Even with their limited freedom, the Filipinos, inspired by the promise of the U.S.A. to grant them full independence, fought valiantly along with U.S.A. troops against the Japanese.

The Press has treated us to stories of Burmese traitors, fighting against the retreating British troops. It spoke of Burmese fifth columnists working for the Japanese.

Let us face the facts. In both Burma and Malaya a small, enlightened, class-conscious section of the people—significantly enough that section which suffered most severely at the hands of the British administration—helped us, and fought the Japanese, either directly as soldiers and guerrillas, or indirectly by giving all possible assistance to the British troops. It is this section which now provides the core of resistance in the places overrun by the armies of Japan. On the other hand, there was the traditionally treacherous section, which has always been willing to serve the highest bidder, which have sided with the Japanese. These people, who were previously the servants of the British Government, are now the servants of the Japanese Imperialists. Between

these two sections lay the vast majority of the people who were left uninstructed about the wider issues of the war, and therefore could not see much difference between the outgoing and the incoming conqueror. They were not armed; they were not told what this war was all about; they were not given any encouragement, or tangible expression of good will by Britain; they were left prey to doubts; they were apathetic; they were not trusted by, and it must also be said that they did not trust, the British authorities. And the result? Another British withdrawal and ravenous Japan pushing her conquests to the Bay of Bengal.

These facts and their significance began to be felt by the British people. They must be seen still more clearly. Their importance must be understood. The Colonial people are just as much in this fight as the British. Therefore the Government must be compelled to adopt new methods of approach to the Colonial problem, in order to enlist fully the free co-operation of the Colonies for the war. Sir Stafford Cripps, shortly after he had assumed office, declared that a new approach is to be made to the Colonial question. Mr. Anthony Eden, in a speech delivered in Glasgow, in which he spoke of a future peace system sustained by the co-operation of the four great world Powers—Britain, U.S.A., U.S.S.R. and China—said the following about the Colonial Empire :—

“What is true of our foreign relations is also true of our Colonial Empire. Our purpose in developing it must not be to gain commercial advantage for ourselves, nor to exploit transient material opportunities. It must be our privilege to raise the standard of life of the many races dwelling in it, to gain their confidence, their trust, their free collaboration in the work we have both to do. This means that men and women must be ready to give up their working lives to this service. The Colonial Empire has given us the lives and work of many of its sons and daughters during

the war. We pledge ourselves not to fail them after the war.”

Mr. Eden speaks of the necessity of gaining the trust and free collaboration of the Colonial peoples. This implies that at present there is neither trust nor confidence, and we must say that this is entirely due to the policy pursued for long years by the British Government, a policy which they appear as yet very reluctant to change. Were the British Government to make specific declarations about the future of individual Colonies, and give definite pledges that they will implement these promises, then we are certain that the cloud of suspicion and distrust will be lifted. It is high time that the Colonial peoples, who bear a good part of the present fighting, be made to feel that they are not fighting, among other things, in order to perpetuate their own slavery. They must be convinced that their aspirations, both economic and political, will not be put aside after the cessation of hostilities. Once certain that while fighting for world freedom, they also fight for their own rights and self-determination, they will offer much more for the Allied cause.

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WHAT IS THE POSITION OF CYPRUS?

Like most of the Colonies, Cyprus has had its full share of neglect. Possibly even more than its full share. It is eleven years since the Cypriots were completely stripped of all constitutional rights. At that time the world economic crisis was raging. The state of the Cypriot producers, *i.e.*, the peasantry and the workers, was indeed terrible. Unemployment was rising, indebtedness mounting, and the peasants were thrown off the land by the moneylenders and the merchant creditors. Taxation was increasing to meet expenses for unnecessary posts. No relief and no unemployment benefit was in operation. The Cypriots could air their grievances over these, but could do nothing else, as they

were shorn of any executive powers. The Constitution which granted very little power to the elected representatives became farcical when the Governor was vested with the power to veto the decisions of the Legislative Council. And the Governor was a man brought up in the worst school of Colonial administration—that which believes in showing the heavy hand of authority to those over whom it rules—and who made no secret of his views that the Cypriots were enjoying the luxury of too much freedom. He was reputed to be an admirer of the Fascist Italian administration of the Dodecanese which, in the view of Cyprus Government circles, succeeded to turn the Dodecanesians into loyal subjects of the Kingdom of Italy. The case of the Dodecanese has special significance in this connection, because its inhabitants, like those of Cyprus, are preponderantly Greeks.

As in all cases where economic desperation is coupled with oppression, so in Cyprus it led to an explosion. The cause was provided by the imposition of a Bill on taxation, rejected by the Legislative Council. The Governor, Sir Ronald Storrs, used his veto to impose it. He flouted the decision of the Council and, in the prevailing circumstances, his action was nothing less than provocation against the people. This provided the cause. The Cypriots had been apprehensive for a long time that the administration, nominally constitutional, was gradually becoming autocratic. The Governor was vested with extraordinary powers and used them so at will. The people, anxious to safeguard and promote their liberties and improve their economic position, were driven to a state where direct action became inevitable. So in October, 1931, a widespread revolt broke out in Cyprus for economic betterment, for the ending of the British association and for union with Greece. The revolt was, in the last analysis, a vast popular protest, not an uprising. The people did not possess arms. Any violent challenge of authority would have been suicidal. The purpose was to demonstrate their plight to the world. It never developed into serious clashes and riots, and, except for the

burning down of the Governor's house and a few other incidents of small import, did not lead to any destruction of property. The net result of the revolt as far as Cyprus was concerned were some people killed, ten persons banished, and nearly two thousand imprisoned. On the Government side there were no casualties—something which speaks for itself.

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DICTATORSHIP.

The 1931 revolt was followed by the establishment of absolutist authority. The Governor abolished the Constitution, declared all the political parties illegal, and by Letters Patent of November 12th, 1931, he was given all power to legislate. In short, the Governor was empowered to rule by decree.

Instead of the Colonial Office and the Government of Cyprus proceeding to investigate grievances, to seek the causes of the revolt and suggest remedies, they adopted the easy road—that of repression. But once an administration is set above popular control and becomes a dictatorship, nobody knows how far it will go. The restraint to excesses, provided by the people, is done away with. Rule becomes despotic. And in Cyprus, where those who ruled were men from the Colonial Office without experience of local conditions and knowing precious little—and that perverted—about the people, that excesses and condemnable injustices should have taken place was inevitable.

In the following years hardly a week passed by without some Government decree restricting further the liberties of the people. The Press was placed under censorship. No article could appear in any newspaper without having previously been read and approved by the censor. Even the reproduction of articles and letters that have appeared in the *London Times* were subjected to censorship, and occasionally passages were omitted. Municipal and local elections were

abolished, and mayors and village headmen are appointed by the Governor, *i.e.*, they are nothing more than Civil Servants. The teaching of Greek history in the Greek schools was forbidden. The police were given the right to enter any house or stop any person in the street and carry out a search, etc.

Some of the laws which have been enacted are so grotesque as to be ridiculous. For instance, no more than five persons are allowed to be together at any one time, without police authority. The Government presumably intended to apply this law in order to forbid political meetings or gatherings of persons which might lead to some kind of political activity. But the law is liable to countless interpretations. Thus you could be punished if you had a funeral procession of more than five persons without police authority. The Cypriots asked themselves jocularly if the purpose of the new law was to reduce the big families to the standard figure of five—otherwise a family of seven might be prosecuted for sitting down to dinner together. It is reliably reported that the Chief of the Legal Department, when getting married, invited a lot of people to his wedding. But he forgot about this law for which he was responsible in framing. At the last minute he found that he was violating his own law, and he had to ask the permission of his department before he could entertain his guests. In 1937 the Vice-Mayor of Larnaca asked permission to hold a dinner party to which about a dozen persons were to be invited, but the Commissioner of the District, evidently not satisfied that politics were not to be discussed, did not grant permission.

By a law of 1937 the Government of Cyprus has the right to deny entrance to Cyprus to any Cypriot returning from abroad—where he has been either on business, for pleasure, or as an emigrant in search of livelihood, “if it is shown by evidence, which the Governor may deem sufficient, that he is likely to conduct himself so as to be dangerous to peace and good order.” By another law of November, 1939, the Governor has given unlimited authority to the

police “to place under arrest or banish any person who works, or is likely to work, in such a way, or who might use his relative freedom of movement, for the propagation of ideas detrimental to the defence of the State.” This is almost the Japanese equivalent of the prosecution of (unexpressed) “seditious thoughts.”

The Cypriots did not take all these lying down. They fought back. At a time, so widespread was the underground opposition to authority that the Government, after long hesitation, began to retreat and allow some limited form of trade union activity. But once this small right was won, the workers pressed steadily forward till now when the majority of them are organised in their trade unions. The organised workers who suffered for so long, both economically and at the hands of authority, are to-day the force behind the war effort. They represent, at the same time, the stable element which, by its organised strength, will make the future working of Cypriot democracy a success.

Politically, Cyprus is still under the same regime introduced in 1931. Although the Government gave a pledge that Municipal and Local elections were to take place in 1941, that promise has not been fulfilled. The administration is not only undemocratic, but, because of its character, being an alien one and out of touch with the people, it is essentially an incompetent one. It is no exaggeration to say that the present administration is incapable of inspiring the people, and does not promote but rather restricts the war effort of the Cypriots.

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THE ECONOMIC SITUATION.

Several visitors to Cyprus have come back with the following comment: “We expected to find poverty, but not to such an extent.” Visitors are surprised that such a small island with a fairly good climate should be so poverty-stricken. It was not many years ago (1934) that the London

papers were reporting that on account of two years of drought the peasantry of certain districts were reduced to such straits that in order to exist they were feeding on roots and barks of trees. "Touched" by these stories of starvation, the British Government despatched Sir Ralph Oakden to Cyprus to report on the economic condition of the island and suggest means of improvement. His report, fairly objective and embodying a number of suggestions, has remained of academic interest only. The Government has taken no measures whatever to put Sir Ralph Oakden's proposals into effect.

Consequently the Cypriots, and in particular the peasants, have been left to linger on in poverty and fare as best they can. Nothing has been done either to provide them with a market for their products, or to save them from the rapacity of the usurers. But the trouble goes deeper than that. Peasant indebtedness began in earnest after the British occupation, and the explanation is as follows:—

When Britain occupied Cyprus from Turkey in 1878 she agreed to pay the Sultan an annual Tribute of nearly £93,000. Britain, as a contracting party to the Agreement, undertook the responsibility herself. But instead of the money being paid by the British Exchequer, it was imposed in the form of a "Tribute" on Cyprus. At the time the total population of the island amounted to about 190,000 and the total revenue to £140,000. The imposition of an extra £93,000 tax annually represented a crushing burden, and as all taxation was borne off the land, it was the peasants, the small property owners, who felt it most. Usury came to the fore, gradually establishing a stranglehold over the rural population.

The Tribute issue proved to be one of the chief grievances of the Cypriots against Britain. It was found in time—but not before its effects were translated into dire poverty—that the economy of the island could not sustain this "exaction" and the Imperial Government stepped in with an annual grant-in-aid of £50,000. The remainder of the money continued to be collected until 1927, when the Tribute was

finally abolished. It must be stressed here that Cyprus, occupied by Britain in 1878, annexed to Britain in November, 1914—after Turkey had sided with Germany in the last war—and declared a Crown Colony in 1924, was burdened with this so-called "Tribute to the Sultan" for fourteen years after its annexation to Britain.

In the course of forty-eight years, just over two and a half million pounds were paid by the Cypriot taxpayers for a purely non-Cypriot responsibility. The money was never paid to the Sultan, but held as a guarantee for the shareholders of the Crimean Loan of 1855. It will be an overdue act of justice, and an act which will be enormously appreciated by the people, if the British Government were to return that money to the rightful owners, and assist in the reinvigoration of the economy of the island.

One of the most tragic views of Cyprus is the poverty of the peasantry. Their lot is hard. They have to toil year in and year out without any guarantee that their produce can find a market. They have to contend with the absence of irrigation facilities, and have to cultivate their fields with the most primitive instruments. Lack of fertilisers is another drawback. One of their principal enemies are the periodic long droughts when for months on end, and even for a whole year, no rain, or very little rain, falls. Then everything is scorched and the people are reduced to real hunger. Such was the case in 1934 and in 1941. But their worst enemies are the moneylenders. Unrestrained by law, they exploit the peasants mercilessly. Over one-third of the land previously owned by the peasants has passed into the hands of the moneylenders during the past twenty years; 82 per cent. of the peasantry are under a collective debt of nearly £40 per head. And if we take into consideration that the average annual earnings of a peasant family—*i.e.*, 75 per cent. of the peasant families—are from £15 to £25, then we can see clearly what this debt-burden means in terms of life.

One of the most urgent tasks facing the Government of Cyprus, whether in war or in peace, is the salvation of the

Cypriot producer. Legislation is absolutely essential to curb the activities of the moneylenders. Furthermore, amendments must be made with the reduction of debts, the severe taxation of the usurers, and the utilisation of the money for the restitution of dispossessed peasants. Encouragement must be given to the producers, and advanced methods of cultivation adopted. These are issues which require the immediate attention of the authorities, otherwise poverty and ruin will be the lot of the Cypriots for years to come.

Along with the measures for the amelioration of want, the questions of irrigation and afforestation are great issues which require attention. Rainwater and rivers can be husbanded, reservoirs built, underground water supplies utilised, and the planting of new forests (where the indiscriminate tree-felling during the last war to supply military requirements in Macedonia and Palestine left whole mountainous districts almost bare) can make the scourge of drought, with its ruinous effects upon agriculture, a thing of the past.

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Agriculture is by far the most important item of the economy of the island. But Cyprus is also rich in metals, particularly copper, chromium and asbestos. Approximately 40,000 tons of copper-pyrites were exported annually in the pre-war years—mostly to Germany. In addition, there is the wine industry and a small craft industry. All in all, these undertakings employ nearly 20,000 workers, their wages averaging £3 to £3 10s. per month. During the period of the world economic crisis and in the following years wages were very low.

As a result of this industrial and mining activity, a strong working-class movement came into existence. The ordinances of the dictatorship, which forbade association of whatever form, prevented the organisation of Trade Unions. But the workers were adamant. They kept up a steady pressure on the Government, formed their illegal unions and proceeded

to take action to safeguard their interests. Gradually the Government opposition began to diminish, and by 1936 some legal Trade Unions were allowed to be formed. Care was taken by the authorities to grant permission of organisation only to those of the applicants who were considered "safe." Step by step the organisations were strengthened and developed, and the Government was forced to allow more Unions to be formed until, according to our information, over three-fourths of the entire working-class population are now organised in Trade Unions.

The organised workers represent at the present the sole stable force in Cypriot affairs. They have their organised strength to bear upon their demands. Because of the ban on political parties they are the only body capable of voicing the demands of the people. They also champion the demands of the peasantry, with whom they are in close association. The development of this association of trade unionists and peasants will provide the stable foundation upon which the post-war democracy will be based.

The trade unionists are wholeheartedly behind the war, and they have already done striking work in arousing the people and playing their rôle in the world battle.

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WHAT ABOUT THE CYPRIOTS?

Official policy has never shown any real interest in Cyprus. Writers and propagandists have entirely forgotten her. As a result very few people know anything at all about the island and its people, its habits and its history.

Semi-official spokesmen and ex-administrators have described it as a backward place, inhabited by a hybrid people, illiterate, poverty-stricken, etc. Some of these spokesmen have even gone to extremes to demonstrate that the Cypriots are not Greeks. The purpose of this is obvious. A hybrid people, having no national traditions, cannot possibly

have any national aspirations. The facts are as follows: Out of a population of 370,000 over 290,000 are Greeks, speaking the Greek language and being Greeks by tradition and national sentiment; 65,000 Turks, and the remainder are small minorities, mostly of contemporary settlers. Yet in spite of this preponderantly Greek character of the island, the Government of Cyprus persists in dividing the people into two main categories, "Mohammedans" (Turks) and "Non-Mohammedans." The nearly 300,000 Greek Cypriots are dismissed in this negative fashion as non-Mohammedans, *i.e.*, as something which cannot definitely be classified.

This type of talk and propaganda is nothing less than insulting. On the top of the sufferings wrought by a prolonged maladministration, the people are being insulted by the perverted propagandists of reaction.

Yet Cyprus has a long history of culture and civilisation. From the sixth century B.C. it has been a centre of Greek civilisation in the East. Greek learning and philosophy blossomed and developed there, and the Stoic philosopher Zeno was born in Cyprus. Later on it fell under the Romans without, however, losing its national character, and from the fourth to the twelfth century A.D. Cyprus became part of the Byzantine (Greek) Empire. In 1191 Richard Cœur de Lion, King of England, on the crusade to Jerusalem, landed in Cyprus and after a brief, but rather fierce campaign, conquered the island. (Great Britain ought to have shown more interest in Cyprus as being the first English possession far from her shores and as Britain has been the begetter of the seven centuries of foreign domination that followed upon Richard's conquest of the island.) Richard sold Cyprus to the Templars, a tyrannic religious order who, faced by considerable popular opposition, were compelled to leave four years later, when Richard resold it to the French nobleman Guy de Lusignan. The Lusignan family ruled over Cyprus from 1196 to 1489, although from 1378 to 1464 the Genoese Republic exercised a suzerainty over a part of the kingdom. In 1489 Cyprus fell into the hands of the

Venetians, who were eventually driven out by the Turks in 1571. Turkish rule lasted until 1878 when Cyprus once again came under British rule, this time as the result of an agreement between Britain and Turkey.

Thus, for the last seven hundred years, Cyprus has been under foreign control. This fact alone speaks eloquently of the tenacity, pride and natural national dignity of the people that they have succeeded to maintain unaltered their language and nationality. Politically Cyprus is now part of the British Empire, but, ethnologically and by reason of language and sentiment, Cyprus—as far as the majority of its inhabitants are concerned—is part of the Greek world.

For years British policy strove to befriend the Turks. Turkish representatives were lionised, official positions given to Turkish people with the purpose of creating a rift between the two national elements of the island. This policy failed. Greeks and Turks, living side by side peacefully for generations, refused to be incited against each other. Some of the extremist nationalists of both sides fell into the trap, but fortunately the majority of the people were not affected. The friendly feelings between the two elements developed into real unity during the years of dictatorship. Both Greeks and Turks since 1931 have equally felt the heavy hand of authority. Both have drawn closer together. Greek and Turkish workers are organised in the same unions, in the same co-operative societies, etc. The enlightened sections of both the Greek and Turkish communities have supported the demand for "autonomy" during the last few years, *i.e.*, the demand for self-government within the British Empire, pending the ultimate final settlement of the Cyprus question in accordance with the aspirations of the people.

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The Cypriots are a democratic people, and find authoritarian rule insufferable. They have a highly developed sense of honour, and a passionate attachment to individual and

general freedom. On several occasions they have demonstrated their love for liberty. They have generously supported every just cause. Cypriot volunteers fought in the Greek liberatory wars of 1912-13 and 1917-20. Cypriot volunteers fought in the first Great War. Cypriot volunteers fought in Spain on the side of Spanish democracy, and thousands of them are fighting now with the British armies in the Western Desert, the Middle East and other theatres of war.

It is up to the British Government to normalise its relations with the people, to grant them elementary human rights and enable them to take yet a fuller share in the struggle.

CHAPTER III.

CYPRUS AND THE WAR.

It is against this background of neglect and maladministration that the Cypriot contribution to the war must be seen, and its deeper significance really understood. There were sufficiently strong reasons for the people to refuse all assistance, to oppose and even try to embarrass Britain in the Mediterranean. The administration held out no hopes for them. This was not their war, and until now, uninformed official obstinacy refuses to allow them full scope of activity. In short, the Cypriots are still fighting without that vital inspiration which is the mainspring of action for all peoples that, as a result of this war, following upon the destruction of Nazism and Fascism, they will be able themselves to taste the blessings of democracy, and be able to determine their own destiny.

In answer to a question in Parliament last February, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies expressed the gratitude of H.M. Government for the assistance given by Cyprus to the war effort, but regretted that nothing could be done at present as regards the political future of the island. War was served as the excuse. But it is precisely in periods of stress that the greatest steps forward, or at least the greatest changes, take place. And in a universal battle for survival nothing should be left undone that even indirectly helps to diminish the ardour for fighting and the desire for victory. In Cyprus the answer of the Under-Secretary created the worst possible impression. It increased the doubts of those who look, as far as they are concerned, towards a barren victory, and strengthened the hands of those who act in secret opposition to the war. Once the character of the war revealed itself fully as a struggle between Fascism and Democracy, the Cypriots, without encouragement or promises of reward, volunteered in their thousands. The Italian attack

upon Greece at the end of October, 1940, brought the war home to them. A "Cyprus Regiment" was previously formed—in February, 1940—but it attracted few recruits. By the end of the year, however, it was in full strength, and thousands of Cypriots volunteered for other units of the British Army, particularly the R.A.S.C. By that time a few companies of Cypriots had fought in France and were among those evacuated from Dunkerque.

Financially the people have contributed nearly £125,000 for the Greek and British Red Cross.

When in the early spring of 1940 the victorious Greek armies in Albania were threatened with a German attack in their rear via Bulgaria, Greece, after five months of fighting single-handed against the Italians, was obliged to ask for the help of Great Britain. One of the first units to be sent to Greece was the "Cyprus Regiment." Out of the 60,000 Imperial troops despatched to Greece by the Middle Eastern Command, just over 6,000 of them were Cypriots.

The British forces in Greece were doomed from the outset. They had arrived too late to be able to occupy any of the fortified frontier positions, or to establish proper contact with the right wing of the Greek Epirus army. The vital and highly defensible Monastir Gap was left almost unguarded. And when the German storm broke loose and the Yugoslav army began to disintegrate—many of its units escaped to the mountains and have since carried on a heroic guerrilla war against the invaders—it was through this gap that the panzers rushed to Salonika, outflanked the Greek positions of Macedonia, and developed a pincers movement against the British forces deployed on Mount Olympus. Faced with encirclement, the British were compelled to withdraw, fighting rearguard actions and slowing down the tempo of the Nazi advance. The "Cyprus Regiment" fought many a bloody contest with the enemy and covered itself with glory at the historic Pass of Thermopylae.

The casualties sustained by the Cypriots were considerable. According to official information 2,300 were killed,

wounded or made prisoners of war. A great price in blood paid by a small island. Cypriots have also fought with distinction in Libya, and a few of them have been awarded medals for bravery.

To-day the Cypriots are fighting again in Egypt side by side with the Dominion, British and other forces of the United Nations. But no mention whatsoever is made of the Cypriots as a fighting unit, either in communiqués, official statements or even articles and correspondence to the Press. The South Africans, Australians, New Zealanders, Poles, Free French, Greeks, etc., are mentioned by name, but the Cypriots are entirely ignored. Not even their action in Greece earned them so much as a single line of praise in the columns of the newspapers.

Why this silence? We suspect that it is a silence inspired by the Colonial Office. But whatever the motives, they are hardly commendable. Are the authorities afraid that by acknowledging the Cypriot sacrifices they will find themselves "in honour bound" to accede to the Cypriot demands? There cannot possibly be any other reason. But whatever methods they employ to hide the facts, truth will always leak out. We trust that the officials will cease adding insult to injury, and cease helping to dampen the spirit of the Cypriots.

Apart from those who have volunteered for the army from the island itself, and 17,000 of whom are serving overseas, there is the Cypriot Home Guard for local defence, and several other thousands in the British Army and the American Army, recruited from among the immigrants in these two countries. It is estimated that about 30,000 Cypriots serve with the armies of world democracy. It is a high and touching contribution from an island of 370,000 persons.

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This voluntary and selfless participation in the war in no way diminishes the essentially constitutional struggle of the

people for more humane administration and the granting of democratic rights. Neither, because they have shed their blood in this war, must it be taken as implying that they are contented. It simply means that the Cypriots rose above the local preoccupations and, in spite of the existing difficulties, did a magnificent job of work.

But discontent, profound and bitter, still remains. How is it argued that after three years of war for the survival and strengthening of free institutions that they are denied every vestige of freedom? Admitting a certain relaxation of repression has been noticed recently. But still all the oppressive measures adopted during the last ten years remain on the Statute Book. Political parties are taboo, and so is the freedom of speech. Whether the Government is conscious of it or not, it is an undoubted fact that the continuation of the present policy acts as a restraint upon the Cypriot war efforts.

The British who extol free institutions and see what free peoples, once conscious of the issues they are fighting for, can accomplish, should not let other people fight with their hands chained.

The economic conditions, always bad, have, because of the war, grown worse. Many of the essential foodstuffs are unobtainable. On account of adverse climatic conditions, the harvest of last year was of very poor quality. The war in the Mediterranean and the lack of shipping has reduced imports to the minimum, and the result is widespread privation. Bread is now being made with a certain percentage of flour and the remainder is made-up with carobs and raisins. Meat is very scarce and is sold at exorbitant prices. Clothes are excessively dear. Profiteering is rampant. Taxation has increased. On top of it all, the Government refuses to take active measures for economic betterment, to enforce a strict rationing scheme, to regulate prices, and bring the profiteers, to book. Even Cyprus products are not evenly distributed. One province might be glutted with a certain commodity, while in another part of the island there is scarcity. Last

winter, for instance, according to Governmental statements, over ten million oranges were left to rot on the trees, *i.e.*, the crop that was exported in the pre-war years, but many of the non-citrus producing areas scarcely saw an orange, which illustrates the general muddle and incompetence.

German propaganda plays upon these issues. Its purpose is to undermine the morale of the Cypriots and to set them against Britain. Its further purpose is to win a fifth column support inside the island to assist the German troops if and when invasion does take place.

Since the beginning of 1942 the Germans have introduced a Cypriot service on the Athens radio. Cypriot Quislings, who have gone over to the Germans and attended classes in the Goebbels school of propaganda, have been put in charge and bombard the Cypriots daily with Nazi propaganda. They harp upon the grievances of the Cypriots, upon the injustices of British rule, and acclaim the New Germanic Order of Europe. Their propaganda is pretty efficient and deals continuously with issues upon which the Cypriots feel very deeply. We are certain that the Cypriots will not fall for this type of Nazi propaganda. They know a lot about the New (prison) Order and have seen the extinguishing of freedom and the slaughter wherever the Germans have held sway. Scores of refugees from starving Greece, who landed in Cyprus and have been made welcome guests, have told them harrowing tales of Greek sufferings under Nazi rule. The martyrdom of Crete has touched them deeply. They have no liking for the Nazis and Fascists. Instead, they have a pronounced hatred for their creed and their methods. But why should the basis of discontent be left there, liable to be exploited by a cunning and unscrupulous enemy?

CHAPTER IV

THE DEMANDS OF THE CYPRIOTS.

IN the preceding chapters we have spoken of the conditions under which the Cypriots live, we touched upon the existing state of affairs, and mentioned the contribution of Cyprus to the war. It is obvious that the Cypriots have done good work already, but that if encouraged they will do much more. It is also obvious that a lot of things must be done to ameliorate the poverty of the people and restore their liberties. If these things cannot be forthcoming because of the specious excuse of the war, then the Cypriots, while doing their duty, will look upon the British declarations of fighting for democracy as a hollow sham.

Admittedly the Cyprus question cannot be solved in the midst of war. But nobody, least of all the Cypriots themselves, have asked for such a thing at the moment. They do not ask for the impossible. Their demands are moderate and can be put into effect immediately. The satisfaction of these demands will encourage them and will contribute in a variety of ways towards normalising the relations between the people and the Government.

The following are the demands which have been voiced either collectively or singly by the Cypriot Press and different organisations during the past twelve months.

(a) *Freedom of Speech and Assembly.*—In war-time there must necessarily be certain restrictions to this kind of freedom, consistent with the demands of security. Such restrictions are readily understood. But what is demanded here is the abrogation of the law forbidding freedom of expression, a law which puts a police spy besides every speaker whenever the latter gets the permission of the Commissioner to address a meeting, and the lifting of the ban on public meetings. By free speech and public meetings Nazi propaganda will be

effectively combated. The enlightened section of the community will be able to inspire the people and banish from their minds all existing doubts about the war. Free expression and free meetings will also provide the means for effectively gauging public feeling. In the present circumstances, it is imperative that this law should be withdrawn.

(b) *Legalisation of Political Parties.*—Political parties have been illegal in Cyprus since 1931, but a considerable amount of underground political activity has been taking place. It is essential that political parties should now be allowed to function freely. This will not only give a measure of freedom to the people, but at the same time it will bring forth popular representatives, capable of voicing the demands of the people and putting their case forward. Sooner or later the British Government will have to treat with such representatives of organised political parties and of the Trade Unions. Why not allow them to come to the fore now, to mature in the struggle and grow as representative personalities? Freedom of political organisation is the mainstay of democracy, and as such essentially a guarantee of further progress. The Government will give no reason why political parties are not allowed. Is it because they have no case to make? The authorities will find it easier to negotiate with official spokesmen of organised parties of the people than with unrepresentative elements, however sincere and honest they may be, voicing but their own opinions.

Legalisation of political parties will be a great step forward for the Cypriots.

(c) *Economic Assistance.*—Under this heading the Cypriots do not ask for money paid by the British taxpayers in order to relieve the poverty in the island. They demand the return of the two and a half million pounds paid by Cypriot taxpayers under the Tribute exaction, and held by the British Treasury. Return of this money will represent an act of overdue justice on the part of the British Government. The two and a half million pounds will be used to save the producers from ruin,

open agricultural credits for the cultivators, assist the dispossessed and generally provide relief for the people. It can be used later on for the construction of water reservoirs, the husbanding of the rainfall and the boring of artesian wells to free Cyprus from the periodical ruin brought about by drought. In present-day Britain the money represents only four hours of war expenditure. But for the Cypriots, to whom after all the money legally belongs, it represents the difference between tolerable existence and unrelievable misery and poverty.

On the economic issue the Government should also tackle the following : curbing of usury ; declaration of a debt moratorium and radical reconsideration of rural indebtedness ; abolition of profiteering ; rationing of commodities and stabilisation of prices of all foodstuffs and other items of primary necessity.

(d) *Declaration by the British Government that the Articles of the Atlantic Charter will also apply to Cyprus after the war.*—Such a declaration will not fail to restore confidence and win for Britain the whole-hearted sympathy and support of the Cypriots.

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Satisfaction of the above demands, and a declaration that the application of the articles of the Atlantic Charter will be applied to Cyprus, will steel the Cypriots to face resolutely whatever trials may lie ahead. On the other hand, a policy of indifference and procrastination, coupled with racial arrogance, is pregnant with disaster. It will be to their credit if the Government act, and act quickly. It will be an acknowledgment of the contribution and sacrifices of the Cypriots.

Cyprus has abundantly demonstrated, with its 2,300 casualties and over a score of thousand soldiers, its loyalty to the Allied cause. It is now up to Britain to recognise this, to satisfy the immediate demands of the Cypriot people, and win their support.

The Committee for Cyprus Autonomy have communicated the demands contained in this booklet to the Cypriot people and the following telegram was received in reply.

“Cyprus people wholeheartedly thank Committee and London Cypriots continuing support Cyprus cause as genuine Cypriots. Church, Working Peoples Party, Trade Unions, other organisations continually demand their just claims. Obviously local Government unwilling create prerequisites enabling Cyprus peoples participate wholeheartedly Allied effort. Forwarding memorandum submitted to Government. Please continue acquainting press, officials, enlightening English public. Cypriots fully approve your demands.”

(Signed) General Secretary Working
Peoples Party, Servas.